

CLAIMS

1. A method comprising:
receiving bill data; and
generating an email message with information including at least a portion
of the received bill data, wherein the amount of bill data included in the email
message is based, at least in part, on an email address of a recipient.

2. A method according to claim 1, further comprising:
sending the email message to the recipient.

3. A method according to claim 1, wherein the step of generating
comprises:
determining whether the recipient is a participant in a secure email network;
and
constructing the email message to include at least an address of where the
bill data may be confidentially viewed if the recipient is not a participant in a
secure email network.

4. A method according to claim 3, further comprising:
constructing the email message to include substantially all of the bill data
along with financial Multipurpose Internet Multimedia Extensions (MIME)
elements which enable the recipient to manage a financial account.

5. A method according to claim 4, wherein the MIME elements enable
the recipient to pay all or part of the received bill.

1 6. A method according to claim 4, wherein MIME elements enable
2 the recipient to establish and manage a financial account.

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4 7. A method according to claim 3, wherein the step of determining
5 comprises:

6 identifying a domain name from the email address; and
7 cross referencing the identified domain name against a list of secure domain
8 names to determine whether the recipient belongs to a secure email network.

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10 8. A method according to claim 1, further comprising:
11 receiving the sent email message including at least a portion of the bill data
12 at the recipients email address; and
13 displaying at least a portion of the message in an inbox of an email client
14 used by the recipient to access their email account.

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16 9. A method according to claim 8, further comprising:
17 displaying the email message in the email client of the recipient, upon user
18 access of the email message, wherein the email message includes financial
19 Multipurpose Internet Mail Extension (MIME) elements that enable the recipient
20 to pay some or all of the received bill.

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22 10. A method according to claim 8, further comprising:
23 paying some or all of the received bill by responding to the email
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25 11. A data network comprising:
a plurality of computing devices, coupled to the network, to facilitate
network access by one or more participants; and

an email server, coupled to the data network and responsive to one or more of the plurality of computing devices, the data server including:

a storage medium to store at least one financial account for each of the plurality of participants; and

a financial transaction manager, coupled to the memory device and selectively invoked by a participant, to manage access to and manipulation of financial account assets to effect requested financial transactions with any network participant or non-participant.

12. A data network according to claim 11, wherein the financial account is electronically linked to an account of the participant at a financial institution.

13. A data network according to claim 12, wherein the account of the participant is one of a checking account, a savings account, a line of credit, and a money market account maintained by a banking institution.

14. A data network according to claim 11, wherein the financial account is one of a checking account, a savings account, a line of credit, and a money market account maintained by a banking institution.

15. A data network according to claim 11, wherein the computing devices are one or more of a personal computer, a personal digital assistant, a kiosk, a telephone and a set-top box having sufficient resources to enable the participant to access the data server and utilize the financial transaction manager.

16. A data network according to claim 11, further comprising an email system having a plurality of data servers including the data server.

1 17. A data network according to claim 11, wherein the data server is
2 controlled by a financial institution.

3 18. A data network according to claim 11, wherein the financial
4 transaction manager selectively transfers assets from a first participant's account
5 to a second participant's account in response to a request by the first participant to
6 transfer such assets.

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8 19. A data network according to claim 18, wherein each of the first and
9 second participants are individual consumers, a business, or a combination of
10 each.

11 20. A data network according to claim 18, wherein the first participant
12 does not have a priori knowledge of the second participant's account information,
13 but identifies the second participant from a list of network participants.

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15 21. A data network according to claim 20, wherein the second
16 participant is identified by one of a name, an alias, or an email address.

17 22. A data network according to claim 11, wherein the financial
18 transaction manager selectively receives assets for deposit in an account of a
19 participant.

20 23. A data network according to claim 22, wherein the assets are
21 received from a brokerage at the request of the participant.

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23 24. A data network according to claim 22, wherein the assets are
24 received from an employer as compensation to the participant.
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1 25. A network according to claim wherein the financial
2 transaction manager prompts a participant for payment authorization in response
3 to a request for payment received from a network service.

4 26. A data network according to claim 25, wherein the network service
5 is an electronic auction service.

6 27. A data network according to claim 25, wherein the network service
7 is an electronic retail service.

8 28. A data network according to claim 25, wherein the financial
9 transaction manager transfers assets from an account specified by the user to an
10 account specified in the request to cover the requested payment, upon
11 authorization of the participant.

12 29. A data network according to claim 28, wherein the financial
13 transaction manager determines whether to honor the participants payment when
14 the specified account has insufficient assets to cover the requested payment.

15 30. A data network according to claim 29, wherein the financial
16 transaction manager utilizes a growing trust model to determine whether to honor
17 the payment when the specified account has insufficient assets to cover the
18 requested payment.

19 31. A data network according to claim 29, wherein the financial
20 transaction manager automatically accesses a line of credit associated with the
21 participant to honor the payment when the specified account has insufficient assets
22 to cover the requested payment.

1 32. A a network according to claim wherein the financial
2 transaction manager notifies the participant of the insufficient funds and that the
3 line of credit has been accessed to honor the requested payment.

4 33. A data network according to claim 25, wherein the financial
5 transaction manager issues an instruction to have a check issued and sent to an
6 address specified by the request, upon authorization of the participant.

7 34. A data network according to claim 33, wherein the issued check
8 includes a uniform resource locator (URL) address of a web page offered by the
9 data server where the recipient can establish an account.

10 35. A data network according to claim 34, wherein the check includes
11 an offer of free assets, credited to a newly established account created by the
12 recipient of the check.

13 36. A storage medium having stored thereon a plurality of executable
14 instructions which, when executed, implement a financial transaction manager
15 according to claim 11.

16 37. An email system, selectively accessed by users on a data network
17 using a computing device, the email system comprising:

18 a user interface, through which a user accesses an account associated with
19 the user;

20 one or more storage devices, to store and maintain account information for
21 each of the users; and

22 a financial transaction manager, responsive to the user interface and
23 coupled to the one or more storage devices, to manage access to and control assets
24 of user accounts in response to user interaction with the user interface to enable
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1 the user to conduct financial transactions with another user or non-user of the
2 email system.

3 38. An email system according to claim 37, wherein the user interface is
4 series of instructions issued to a computing device of the user to create a web page
5 at the computing device.

6 39. An email system according to claim 37, wherein the user interface is
7 a series of instructions issued to an email client executing on a computing device
8 of the participant.

9 40. An email system according to claim 37, wherein the financial
10 transaction manager selectively transfers assets from a first user's account to a
11 second user's account in response to a request by the first user to transfer such
12 assets.

13 41. An email system according to claim 37, wherein the financial
14 transaction manager causes a check to be printed and sent to another at the request
15 of a user.

16 42. An email system according to claim 41, wherein the check includes
17 an offer to create an account at the email system.

18 43. An email system according to claim 40, wherein each of the first
19 and second users are individual consumers, or businesses.

20 44. An email system according to claim 40, wherein the first user does
21 not have a priori knowledge of the second user's account information, but
22 identifies the second participant from a list of network participants provided by the
23 financial transaction manager.
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1 45. An email system according to claim 40, wherein the second user is
2 identified by one or more of the user's name, alias, or email address.

3 46. An email system according to claim 37, wherein the financial
4 transaction manager selectively receives assets for deposit in an account of a
5 participant.

6 47. An email system according to claim 46, wherein the assets are
7 received from a brokerage at the request of the participant.

8 48. An email system according to claim 46, wherein the assets are
9 received from an employer as compensation to the participant.

10 49. An email system according to claim 37, wherein the financial
11 transaction manager prompts a participant for payment authorization in response
12 to a request for payment received from a network service.

13 50. An email system according to claim 49, wherein the network service
14 is an electronic auction service.

15 51. An email system according to claim 49, wherein the network service
16 is an electronic retail service.

17 52. An email system according to claim 49, wherein the financial
18 transaction manager transfers assets from an account specified by the user to an
19 account specified in the request to cover the requested payment, upon
20 authorization of the participant.

21 53. An email system according to claim 52, wherein the financial
22 transaction manager determines whether to honor the participants payment when
23 the specified account has insufficient assets to cover the requested payment.
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1 54. An email system according to claim 52, wherein the financial
2 transaction manager utilizes a growing trust model to determine whether to honor
3 the payment when the specified account has insufficient assets to cover the
4 requested payment.

5 55. An email system according to claim 52, wherein the financial
6 transaction manager automatically accesses a line of credit associated with the
7 participant to honor the payment when the specified account has insufficient assets
8 to cover the requested payment.

9 56. An email system according to claim 25, wherein the financial
10 transaction manager issues an instruction to have a check issued and sent to an
11 address specified by the request, upon authorization of the participant.

12 57. An email system according to claim 33, wherein the issued check
13 includes a uniform resource locator (URL) address of a web page offered by the
14 data server where the recipient can establish an account.

15 58. An email system according to claim 34, wherein the check includes
16 an offer of free assets, credited to a newly established account created by the
17 recipient of the check.

18 59. A storage medium having stored thereon a plurality of executable
19 instructions which, when executed, implement an email system according to claim
20 27.